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Gideon Bachmann; Lina Wertmüller

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"Look, Gideon—"

GIDEON BACHMANN TALKS WITH LINA WERTMÜLLER

America's love for Lina Wertmüller is a big joke in Italy. "Saint Lina of New York" is what the Rome daily *Il Messaggero* called her, after headlining the New York superlatives by John Simon, Jack Kroll, Jay Cocks and Vincent Canby with that sweet smell of tolerance the Italians reserve for the mad. But remember that the Italians didn't like *Rome Open City* when that came out, and that its American success and international acclaim couldn't cause that one to make money in Italy, either.

That isn't, however, what's happening to Lina. Her films do make money here—oodles of money. It's the Italian critics who don't think that there's

much to them. What is considered her commercial touch is precisely what they oppose. The problems she caressingly portrays *are* the true problems, they say, but the concern for their solution, what she calls her choice for the popular, are thought of as fake.

Italy makes 250 films a year, and a good third of these are set in the present Italian calamity. To use the problems of unemployment, government corruption, poverty, fascism, church duplicity, family squabbling, mommism, inefficiency, and the whole gamut of Latin lassitudes as subject matter for films is so common here that Lina's films don't seem so different from their peers. And

it certainly cannot be said that her love for her fellow *furbi* goes beyond the exploitation of their foibles.

A *furbo* is an Italian who manages. He knows he can only survive by his *furberia*—by his ability to forego justice, correctness, respect, reliability, openness, sincerity, and honesty, and to live by his wits alone. In the Italian cinema—and in this it is the most typical of its country—to be a *furbo* is a law of life. If you're not one, forget it.

Lina is a top *furba*, a hard worker, and an intuitive pulse-taker of her nation's concerns. It would be useless to try and introduce her; no phenomenon yields easily to rationale during its fervid currency. One is pleased that history has done justice to the manic euphoria that surrounded *Last Tango*; there is hope that it will redimension the Santa Lina craze. Like a summer storm, the wilder the explosions the faster the calm.

When I went to see her shooting *Seven Beauties* in Rome, and later at her rooftop apartment on the Vatican side of the Tiber, hours and tapes rolled by in abandoned disdain for continuity, logic, questions and the answering of questions. This summer storm of a woman is easier to get going than to stop: despite what one may think, not exactly an ideal partner for an interview. In the end we didn't do one; we just talked. I carried the five hours of tape with me for a few months, hoping to make sense of the swishing array of unconnected thematic. Eventually I lost an hour of it on a plane in Australia. No matter. All you have to do is to zoom in on this pointillistic canvas, and like a Seurat it suddenly reveals structural dimensions of great simplicity. But maybe a return to simplicity wouldn't do Lina that much harm. After all, it's what she sells.

LINA WERTMÜLLER: What would make me really sad would be the realization that my success is due to being a woman. Anyway I don't think that's it. My success has something to do with the choice I have made to make a popular kind of cinema. I believe that is what makes it contemporary in the general sense and what makes it part of the particular civilisation we have here. In the US I think you are giving a different importance to popular culture than we do in Italy. Here

we have much more of a histrionic tradition: we are used to the hierarchies of actors, of the comedy styles, to personalities who impose themselves from the stage, to the tyranny of the spectacle itself. In the US you are concerned with what a work says, with its social connotations.

GIDEON BACHMANN: *It seems to be that almost all films of any value in the years since the war have a common theme, which it sounds almost banal to name: the conflict between the individual and the type of society he has created. Histrionic or sociological, the implications are the same; maybe we just approach things more cerebrally and we love those who are earthier.*

Approaches don't change urgencies. If it is true that an artist, with his intuition, does and says much more than he plans to, much more than he can rationally analyze, it is also true that he is part of the dialectic you describe and has as much difficulty in adjusting himself to mass civilization as any spectator has. He ends up expressing this difficulty in the language of his particular culture. His uneasiness derives not just from the realization of the anomalous population growth that suffocates him like a cancer, but from his fear that the organization that our numbers impose might deform his individual cell. This is a fundamental fear that permeates every aspect of life in our culture. The incredible acceleration in this century which makes us participate in races we ourselves are unaware of is a syndrome no previous generation suffered. For the past 40 years, in art, we have been destroying, taking apart. Not so much in the cinema, because there are so many exterior factors and involvements, and because it's an industry, a social evasion, a frivolous escape. And, above all, because it's popular. Being a product, a consumer item, it continues against all odds, and artists, despite themselves, find themselves involved in it. But the cinema is also a social service. For me, anyway, that is its major definition. This makes us artisans, and not necessarily artists, although one may well be one, in cinema as in other disciplines.

Do you mean to say that the cinema does not participate in the drive to destroy, but that this is accidental, and that if one is an artist one should do it in the cinema as well?

I think all these things are largely unconscious. I believe that in this great wave of destruction of

everything, which is a dimension of our time, man inevitably comes up with this central but often unconscious drive, the drive to anarchy and freedom. It is a question of the spirit of man. For example, despite the fact that I myself consider anarchy an ideological utopia, I believe that in man's aspirations to it there is manifest an expression of his most profound search for harmony with nature. This thought might well be at the root of the success of my films. America, I feel, in its most intimate fiber, senses a desire for anarchy and individualism which is extremely strong. This heredity of the pioneer days is a reaction to mass civilization. Destruction all around is inevitably monstrous and Kafkaesque. It is inevitably antihuman. How can you keep 180 million people happy without creating a repressive structure, even if for political reasons it doesn't seem to be one? Even if it doesn't seem so, it is an exploiting structure. It has to be.

The question is almost ethological: can this harmony with nature be found through individualism? Most other species seem to achieve it by going the opposite way, by eliminating individuality.

Well, aren't they disappearing?

Certainly not; look at the bees and the ants.

There the individual becomes the society. This is at the expense of the individual, of course. Nobody can assure me that the world of tomorrow will not be inhabited exclusively by bees and ants. But I think that before we become ants, our species will die. This last-minute growth of intelligence may well be a last-minute attempt to save ourselves. There are so many signs of decline.

Do you really believe that the cinema is useful in stopping this trend?

It may or may not be useful, but it's unavoidable. Why, for example, has television not killed the cinema? There is something about the cinema that makes it penetrate deeper, something about its language which is perceived in silence in a group, which makes it essential to our culture. What dies are the elitist, aristocratic uses of the cinema, the underground and all that. Culture has always been very aristocratic, especially over here. Especially culture conceived as communication. Culture has always been "wielded" by the powers that be, while one of their weapons has been the keeping low of mass consciousness. A developed, culturally advanced public could become danger-

ous for the ones in power. One doesn't have to go very far to find an example, take the Soviet Union. It is true that they have popular culture studies, but what they are concerned with is the anthill, not the ant.

When I asked whether you consider the cinema useful, it was because I see that despite 30 years of conscious film-making—let's say since the end of the war—the world goes happily along on its self-destructive path.

Do you think it does? I think our road is pegged in any case, and I am not sure if it is a road up or a road down. The cinema is part of ourselves, and participates in our walking of the road. It participates in the blood communication of these times.

Saying that the cinema is a social service means, however, that one applies one's efforts in a very specific direction?

The more people apply themselves, the more heads think of this usefulness, the better. A single individual can only apply his head in one way, but I believe that any application is fruitful.

It may also be dangerous. Especially if it becomes popular, as your work does. Seeing a problem treated on the screen, the viewer may be tempted to relinquish his own efforts—after all, he feels, Lina Wertmüller is doing something about it.

When a film remains open and problematic, this does not happen. The catharsis that a good film can sustain is not always a liberating one, it is true. If the problems treated are not "popular" but "of the people," there are better chances, but still no guarantees. In any case I cannot steer the reactions, but one hopes for the best in people and in their perceptive abilities. The works are not made by the people but they belong to them. There is a difference. What I mean by "popular" is the concept that is opposed to "aristocratic"; that is what I want my films to be. Of course you can read my films in many different ways. Certainly John Simon's reading of them is different than that of a Sicilian immigrant. I am, of course, trying to reach more people, and "popular" does have this connotation as well, but I am more interested in reaching more Sicilian immigrants than more John Simons. In fact, I am not seeking the approval of the Simons—it is they who come to me, to discover how I make my constructions for the Sicilian (and I am only saying Sicilian in order

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to say Third World). It is only within the analysis that Simon undertook that the element of quality in my work came up—as a method, more than anything else. The film becomes “culturally Sicilian,” although the method is beyond the consciousness of the Sicilian. My film-making is a conscious choice, and I say that I have made a decision for popular work because I have chosen a form that should reach as far as possible. And there is only a single definition for my method: the definition is myself. The thing must please me first. Every choice must please me. That is the most honest approach to any work. If each one of us did what he profoundly believes in, he would not only be honest with himself but couldn’t help being honest with others. Aren’t we, each one of us, the sum of all the others? You may not know why you like something, but if you like it, it represents you. Your whole heart is then in it. And all your science, your preferences, your life, your sex, your liver. In film-making, I keep saying to myself, I am each person, each character. I am the good and the bad, I am the house and the landscape, I am the movement of the camera.

Does that mean that everything that you attack in your films is also you? What about the many references to fascism—Italian fascism and now German fascism in Seven Beauties? Maybe this is the root of the criticism that has been addressed against this film and its very particular way of showing the war—that it's basically your war, your view of it, though you haven't had the experience yourself, thus your imagination?

I don’t make films about the fascist era, but films about us, today. If I get to make *Caligula*, my next project, it will also be about us, today. It will be a film about those days, but not a historical film. I shall invent the reality of old Rome, of course. It will be fables and parables. It concerns the Roman subproletariat in an epoch when Rome had only been an empire for a short time, and consisted of a military-industrial-aristocratic society. I still don’t know where I will shoot it. There is another film, about two couples, that I must make first, so-called modern couples. But the *Caligula* project is an old one; it’s 10 years since I wrote the script. And I never managed to make the film. Even with this new contract I have with Warner Brothers—you know, these are theoretical contracts; if one tries to maintain one’s indepen-



dence and freedom like myself, these contracts mean practically nothing. All they represent is a *jus primae noctis*, a first option or refusal on their part of my future projects. But since I maintain ownership of my stories and scripts, I also remain my own boss, and the contract has no actual usefulness; it doesn’t guarantee I can make the films I want. Although in order to be allowed to make the film, I would do anything, as always.

You wouldn’t mind working outside of Italy, for example?

Certainly not. All you need to know is what you want to say. Then you can make the film anywhere. There are no obstacles. I don’t even speak English and yet I manage to tell jokes in America. I appear on US television; all you have to know, is what you want to say. The assurance carries you. What counts is the will to communicate.

Why did you say you wouldn’t want to be successful because of being a woman?

I have a reserved relationship to feminism. There are many things they say that I don't agree with. I understand the need for a breakaway, and in our society, patriarchal for so many millenia, the breakaway must be polemic and aggressive. The need for scandal can lead to all those aberrations. But I simply do not believe that the problem of women is the clitoris instead of the other thing. The problem is on another level. The human being is a human being, and I couldn't care less for the sex they happen to be. The humanity is the only sure thing. There are so many social needs that must precede the sexual ones. What does count is that there is a form of social organization that precludes equality between men and women. This problem center is the family. As long as we continue being organized in family units there is always one—the woman—who pays the double price. This whole business of love and sons, the obligations and feelings that these provoke, are blackmail weapons. All this is so firmly rooted in us, that it will not be an easy battle to eradicate any part of it. I firmly believe that the family must go.

You do not believe, for example, that the couple is just the last remnant of the tribe?

Ah, but what a difference! In the tribal structure we had the chance for a wide exchange and a sharing of rights and duties. In one of our ancestral regions, for example, here in Latium, there was a matriarchical society for the very reason that the having of sons and the keeping of the home imparted a political power to women which the men simply helped to maintain. None of this can happen today, none of the sharing and none of the natural harmony, in a two-room apartment with three kids. The couple imprisoned within them and the TV set. And they get married at 18, when they are least prepared! And straight off to that high-rise prison. What kind of life can that become? Pure hell! Compared to the space and the communication within a tribe, which not only brought the similar together but also the different, the generations, the common interests. The entire psychological defense system was different.

Perhaps instead of eliminating the family one should enlarge it?

I believe in a whole new form of social nucleus. It's the problem of the bees and the ants again, as

you say. What we have done to the tribe is not just that we have reduced it to the smallest possible size, but we have robbed it of its essential meaning. Even if in an apartment house there were just that many private rooms and that many public rooms, matters would be different. I have no recipe, though; all I know is that the family, as it is conceived now, is destructive. It is, by definition, a blackmailing form.

This then, and not equality, is the basic problem for women?

Well, this is the first, real problem of feminism. How the roles will be divided under a new structure, we must invent ourselves. We must in any case refuse to accept transferred rules. It's just as important to decide who makes the bed and who scrambles the eggs, as it is to know, upon whom to vent one's frustrations—upon what individual or what group. Man, humiliated by work, returns and creates his private slave in the home. Stronger, he can take it all out on her. Man has his own private Third World. This is how he became a king: by having a slave. And we try to take away that last security valve! Imagine what's happening to his frustrations and aggressions now! What will remain of man? That is a problem which is at least as grave as that of the enslavement of women. What needs to be found are new balances to equalize these energies, new systems that allow for more solutions, more possibilities to let off steam. A certain kind of pecking order is part of our make-up. There is no use denying too much of our nature, or in a new utopia nothing will work again. What you can demand of a new order is equal chances, equal social services, the division of riches and opportunities in an equal manner. But you cannot demand that men all become alike. Because we aren't. What would be the point of becoming more idiotic just because the majority is, for example? What we need is a base, upon which harmony can grow, equality has a chance, and freedom becomes livable. The beginnings of new systems are always good, but we need structures that are realistic. It's man who applies the rules, judges apply the law, and man in society must become sure of himself, must acquire that principal and fundamental maturity that allows him to adjust and not to become rigid in search of security above all. At the moment we live at the expense of each other, by the principle of dom-

ination and achievement. We do not realize that the principle of beginning one's liberty where that of the other ends creates new slaveries.

Who will control the new man to make sure he sticks by the new rules?

We don't want new rules, we want new men. We must be careful to make sure we know what that means. The mafia, too, is a form of tribe, but it is not what we seek, because it is a parasitical system. That we have enough of as is. This kind of social formation can only live upon others; it is precisely the measure of our sickness. It's the same cancerous problem which bases human intercourse upon a nonproductive, exclusively exploitative hierarchy. The productivity no longer comes from being productive but from robbing the productivity of the fellow next door. It is the clear example which the lack of equality produces. Maybe that is the reason why the ants continue: they share evenly even when they are many. We must have forgotten how to do this somewhere along our genealogy. This is what individualism can lead to: ideas of domination always spring from the head of single individuals, who try to *become* society. All they do is destroy it. Every choice we make, however personal, concerns all, absolutely all. But we cannot sit still and claim that we must first become ourselves and then social beings; that leads to stagnation and the dominant then can easily subdue us.

How does that go with your statement that everything you do must first of all please yourself?

I see no conflict; it's very instinctive to me. There is no preordination; it's consciousness-taking that is at the base. That is a dimension of individuality. Each situation demands a decision that pleases me, yes, but it must be in accordance with my social position and consciousness. The dialectic of these forces in me make up what we call politics. For me, personally, I watch out for escapes: I make sure to avoid escaping from reality, and this keeps me aloft and engaged. I love reality and I am very happy to be alive, despite everything, despite our nostalgia for the good old times. I think the days we live now are magnificently dialectical and directed towards the future, even if they will turn out to be the days of the end.

But the past does continue to attract you. Take this Caligula: what is his contemporary, modern

dimension? Why do you say that making a film about him you will be making a film about us, today?

I am very intrigued by the parallel between this most despotic of all the big emperors and the Catholic god. Both functioned and rule on the principle of guilt, of sinning. The whole system of the Church is copied from the Romans. It is basically the system invented by Livia, one of the strong ladies of history. All it lacked, that system, was the mysticism of the Church, which replaced fear in its pure state, which is what the Romans used. In ancient Egypt sacrality and the earthly power of the priest caste utilized the same direct, physical fear to control men. The Church replaced this with the fear which is typical of psychoanalysis: the confessional. All you need to do as a priest is spend a year in a village and you know everything, every most secret moving force of that society, and if you want to, you can destroy them all through fear. In fact, it is enough that people think you could destroy them, you don't actually have to want it. And if every priest knows, on this level, 30 or 100 persons, the caste controls the whole state.

Isn't the cinema, in a way, a similar social structure? You end up controlling that many people, and the director risks becoming a despot. It is always the best who seem to be accused of this, somehow.

These temptations slumber in all of us, and "being" implies this danger. One has to be aware all the time, and this is another reason why films must be honestly problematical and sincerely social, to remain open at the end. To talk to oneself can be the more honest way, for example, but it depends on the person doing the talking. In my own films, for example, the theme is almost always the same: I almost always tell the simple story of a man in relation to his society or in conflict with it, a man who arrives unprepared, naive, and is confronted with the machinery of a certain society which he is forced to make his peace with. The profound meaning of the theme I prefer can perhaps best be understood by taking as an example Pasqualino in *Seven Beauties*, in whom I express the urgency for the creation of a new man, because if we don't hurry, it may be too late. This way of seeing vitality as death, or as becoming death when it is dissociated from con-

sciousness, is a clear reference to our civilization: this thing which seems so positive and reveals itself as deadly.

As you know, many have interpreted Pasqualino's vitality as your defense of those physical, heartless forces of survival at any cost, which you now say are bound to kill us as a race.

That seems incredible to me. That anybody can see Pasqualino, the way he comes back from the camp, and maintain that he has a reason to go on living, seems absurd to me. Or that he has a right to go on living. . . . Even if one may somehow be tempted to read the film in this way, I hope that the film, as a whole, will reach beyond consciousness, and thus it seems to me that it is extremely clear that one cannot continue to live under these circumstances. That vitality, here, is a sign of death and not of life, when it is devoid of consciousness. The positive symbols of the films are the anarchist, the socialist, the ones who choose liberty even if it represents dying. This is the life of man, but that empty survival is his death. To live at the expense of everything is death. What lives on is not a man, but some other being, a being full of shit, full of distortion. One who says I want to make a hundred sons is a cancer, is blind, senseless, and destructive. One who is ready to do anything is mad—he is the one who under conditions of overpopulation becomes violent. He is the one who will kill in order to live. That is why that film is about us, today, and that is why I am not worried about becoming despotic as a film director. It is a problem which is close to me and I cannot help thinking it is everybody's problem today. I think I am saying this all the time: that man has to hurry, has to create a new man soon, one who is really worth calling man. Otherwise death will overtake us. The death in the anthill.

The characters you choose in order to show the dangers are always popular figures, with whom large segments of what you call the Third World will identify. I can see that they will be tempted to identify with the survival instinct rather than learn of its dangers, because for thousands of years survival has been their sole drive.

Life and death, destruction or salvation, are however in their hands, not in ours. They are the ones who will have to understand that what the anarchist says in my film—"new man must be

born"—is more important than Pasqualino's stance. They will have to learn to feel that in the end harmony with nature can be found only by choosing the road of the one who may die in the shit but feel free, and that Pasqualino, who will live, has understood nothing. Even popular audiences will understand that it is the anarchist who is right and not Pasqualino.

I don't see where, in the film, they will find reasons to believe the anarchist, who is depicted almost as a comic character, and who certainly doesn't exactly die a hero's death. Maybe on an intellectual level this will occur, but in Italy, where identification is important and where people are still going to the cinema in masses, I think that the dangers of misinterpretations are extreme. In fact, I have heard your film discussed, in words and in print, as a eulogy for survival.

This is a great problem, and we all have it. In a way, all my films deal with it, too. Because they treat the problem of accepting things without thinking. It's what we all do, every day, we accept things. We accept a series of compromises, first one and then others, in order to continue, in order to live. That is the definition of vitality, the drive to live at all costs. I think that may be the reason why Americans feel so related to Pasqualino. They know all about the anthill. All about mass civilization. And of course all about survival, except that I don't think they would misinterpret Pasqualino that way. And if you look at other characters in my films, they are all very similar, and the interpretations don't seem so problematic to me. Take *Mimi*, or *I Basilischi*, or *Let's Talk About Men*: the basic theme is always the same. *Mimi* lives the experience of the false progress, of the false consciousness-taking, of the false political growth, and he doesn't live any of it intimately, but only in a sort of superficial zone, as do all those who . . . all of us. If you stop people in the street, for example, you will find them talking about these things, about politics and progress, and then, inside, they feel very differently. They continue to believe in the past, they are superstitious, they continue to believe in all the antique sicknesses, in the Mafia, in the idea of power, in the priests, in abnegation, in licking the ass of the powerful, and nothing, underneath, ever really changes. All these proposals for a new structure of society, for a new man, fail because of this basic

inertia and fear. Societies are made of men and won't change unless men do. Take for example the possibility of a communist structure, administered by persons with a mentality like Hitler—a thing which may well happen—and you will see at once that nothing will be renewed. Within mass civilization it is almost impossible for a new system not to become repressive. To make a system applicable to 300 million people it must be a system of low denominators. It is useless to think that it will not, in the end, be a repressive system. The only way I can go on believing in any kind of future at all within this mass civilization, is by the notion of cellular, individual structure. Maybe, through the interaction of the cells made up of individuals, one can reach some sort of equilibrium.

Why then have you never shown such a structure in one of your films except in All Screwed Up, and there again in such a way as to show up the weaknesses?

For the time being I have not made any proposals in any of my films, but I have sounded the alarm. I am still searching proposals myself. It is time for all to search. If I knew how to do more than sound the alarm, I would be more than I am. The dangers of wrong identification exist, but there is always, in my films, the moment where the division occurs, where things, I think, become clear and the dangers abate. There is a cathartic moment where the viewer stops identifying with the hero. In *Mimi* it is the moment he sees that big ass, in *Seven Beauties* when he shoots his friend, not before. Up to this point the spectator, despite all the compromises, continues to follow him. It is always a matter of choice, of a choice made by the character at this point and a choice to be made by the spectator at the same point. There is the point of rupture within the rapid arc of the catastrophe.

But these Neapolitans who will see Seven Beauties, who already feel that making children, despite all, is a blessing, and who know you personally, have seen you shoot the film in their streets, and now sit there in the cinema waiting to be confirmed—and you end the film saying he wants a dozen kids—where are they to get the independence for achieving this rupture point?

I don't think it's that bad. I think there are lots of allusions in the course of the film that indicate my real view. I show this flood of sons and of sons

of sons and I show that in order to have them they must sell their souls. My characters are always forced to do what they hate doing most, to make compromises, to work for the election campaign of the fascists; it's a typical popular operation: it seems to be going well but it is going terribly.

To reach the rupture point the spectator must think, and suddenly from being a visceral operation it becomes a cerebral one. Is he trained for it?

This is always necessary and always occurs. In all my films there is this need. Often I show that in order to have sons the soul goes to the devil. This is true even when you have no sons; you have to sell the soul just to make them, just for the dream, 25 in *Pasqualino's case*. I don't think it's that hard to discern; certainly it's an everpresent theme and not news. I don't think we are that dense. We are struggling towards these realizations anyway, and I am not too demanding—I am a socialist, not a communist. I think that man can be saved out of the disorder, out of the weaknesses and the mistakes. Salvation doesn't come from imposed order. That's why I believe that small steps are more useful. Small communities, for example, joined together in a zone of a town, a series of zones joined together in a city, but each one of these cellular communities to maintain and create its own laws. The dangers are on the outside, in industrialization and functionalism. They tell me I must move my tree because the road needs to pass. I say no! I will make the road go round my tree. It doesn't matter if the road is then less practical, longer. I must make it go round. Everybody always agrees on this principle until it comes to putting it in practice. Then they begin to calculate and draw remunerative conclusions. These things are very important to me, and I am beginning, more and more, to be politically active, since I want to work for less alienation, for creating a world that is less a provice for the *virtuosi*. Things should be simpler, more in the dimension of man. You must be careful not to fall victim to certain terminologies. For example "tribal" is wrong, and when I say "community" I certainly don't mean a bunch of hippies or a group that fuck together. I mean something else. Say a community of bank employees, of teachers, of some thirty people of various professions, various tastes and orientations; it could exist in this very building. Why do people who have friends always

end up living in buildings where they know nobody? In the evening they go out to visit a friend who again lives in a building where he knows nobody, and together they go on to a third one, and so on. Why can't they organize themselves a bit better? Tell each other where they are going to live and move into the same buildings. They could join forces, share certain expenses, meet, etc. Shared problems are halved. I don't know why nobody does this. Man is really stupid sometimes. Imbecilic, cretinous—the typical petty individuality of the *petit bourgeois*: why should I go where Maria lives? I want something better! Individualism is put at the service of the wrong drives. Honor, pride, ownership . . . honor is placed in man's prick and in woman's cunt, whereas in reality honor would be not to destroy others, not to damage society by having too many sons, for example. Mind you, I am for individualism at all levels, but I don't want to pay for it by causing the death of the structures that keep it alive.

How are you going to keep the new "communities" from developing and becoming possessive and smallminded like the families you abhor?

There are always elements that survive. Take that big apartment building in Milan where I shot *All Screwed Up*. From the balconies of the interior the old people were watching out for the children. This is a carry-over from the classic living center of old Rome and other civilizations, and there are the *alloggiate* everywhere in Italy, those buildings with inner courtyards, which by their physical structure sustain a certain living-together approach to the everyday chores and their partial sharing. There is really a small step—except that nobody takes it—from this to the system whereby a few of the women would shop, others would cook, a third group would take care of the kids, and the making of the money, too, would be coordinated. I realize that there are limits, and that what one can come up with today may not correspond to the needs of tomorrow. But I am sure of one thing: one must find solutions within small groupings. Take the cinema: again you work with a group, live with a group of about 60 persons. You establish a contact and a collaboration with them all. It's like a patrol in a war, a small group of people with a unifying task, not so big as to preclude personal friendship among all. There is hope in that kind of human contact,

that kind of communalism. The kibbutz wasn't the same thing, since it was a pioneering moment and sacrifices unite. But in a city, where the needs are enormous, the success of such a venture might be the result of external needs: when everybody is desperate, every new idea succeeds for its positive part. But it's a matter of organization—the way we live now, if we leave every other aspect of modern life intact, there is very little chance that my idea will work. Look at me—I can't share in the tasks of the house! I have to finish a script, I get home very late when I shoot, I travel a lot—how can I fit into my own utopia? No, we need to start further down. External needs and structures must be changed along with our internal ones. Even in the new socialist systems things don't work. I feel that they have largely extinguished the individual. I have spoken to many from those countries, and this total lack of competitiveness is really inhuman. It leads to the eradication of many basic human qualities. The color, the smell, the taste of humanity is lost. The difference between these systems and the anthill is only that there is less mass vitality here. In the anthill, the whole anthill is a kind of person.

I still maintain that you have conflicts there. This vitality you criticise in us but of which you lament the loss in the socialist or anthill state, is also that—according to yourself—which maintains our human aspects. Vitality is practically the only thing that keeps individuality alive.

I keep harking back to man as a measure of it all; he alone can make it come off, he alone can use vitality in positive or negative ways. In the hands of man vitality can lead to death or to life. In any case, everything I say in film can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and I do not find this objectionable. One does what one can to hook into the best possible type of comprehension, preferably a rounded-out type, on the part of the spectator. One does have a feeling how one's message arrives, even if one must rely on the ticket sales figures alone. Despite everything others say, I do believe that this is a measure of the type of reading a spectator is capable of. Since I absolutely do not make a cinema of escapism, and one cannot say, thus, that people go to see my films because of the sex or the violence in them, they must like the engagement in them. For my type of cinema, the popular type, the fact that they come

to see it is proof of their acceptance of my message.

Admitting my bias and the compromise I make with the keys for communication, and my desire not to create a monument for myself but to supply a social service, it is centrally important for me to be understood. I do not think I could go on making the films otherwise. What I produce are not entertainments but grotesques, problem films, and thus their success cannot depend on their ability to carry people away from themselves. In fact, people are always somewhat angry because I do not supply that easy sort of escape. I am somewhat like the guy who goes with a woman but always has something to criticize. There is a sting to the works. People come out of the films and begin to wonder, "What the hell is this all about?" —they cannot easily put it all away in a simple drawer. They are problem films. They make talk. This has always happened, ever since the first film I made. In the evenings, after the cinema, the streets are always full of talkers. Here you go, for example, wondering whether vitality is a matter of life or death.

Did you expect your problem films to be as popular as they are?

Look, Gideon, we have known each other for many years. You have seen that I am one who loves people, a curious one, and that whatever one may say about me, this part is authentic: I am vital myself and I love people. There is something in me that creates sympathies, openness towards human beings, reflects my own attitude, and this is infectious. And finally I think I am just honestly seeking that which we all seek, a common goal, a common research, a common anxiety—I just don't like to be alone. That's why I don't think my cinema is particularly Italian, although many say it is. It simply concerns common problems. It's not a matter of style, or what the producers think, who are happy to have found someone who makes things they consider close to American taste. This is all nonsense. My films are no more "close to" American taste than they are Italian. They are common. Everything born in accordance with a commercial formula ends up functioning perfectly as an expression of popular culture. Nobody thought of making the American gangster films of the thirties as particularly engaged films of sociological significance; they became significant because they worked.

Are you saying culture is accidental in cinema?

Well, take Chaplin. He didn't care on bit about culture. He was into movies to make money. And he happened to create culture. Culture goes by its own ways, you can't always plan it. Like history, you discern it looking back. Time creates totally different readings for works that are made for one or another motive. That's why I say that my cinema, for example, is not principally Italian. I am Italian, and thus I utilize formulas and canons, symbols, archetypes, folklore, the obvious and the banal, that are part of a kind of Italian picture postcard, which however have no basic influence on the theme at the base of the films. In addition, I never predict the style and the impact, and I am the first who is surprised when I am told that I am, for example, making a folkloristic kind of film. It is not true that I plan to do this. I don't make them to be folkloristic, or banal, or anything that can be imprisoned in an adjective. What is important is the authenticity that goes into the story, into the people I show. All else is luxury. I refuse the concept of the conventional; if you are not conventional, nothing you do will be conventional. The fact that you happen to fall in love in Venice, let's say, and go there for a honeymoon, doesn't make you a conventional lover. There are no formulas; things become formulas when they do not stem from inside of you but are accepted from the outside. The fact that I make a cinema that talks of things of which many have always talked, doesn't mean that I make the same kind of cinema that has always been made. I think what I do could be called a recycling of things that are part of our tradition. I use things that exist. Elena Fiore, for example, the fat lady of *Mimi* and the sister of Pasqualino in *Seven Beauties*, is a force of nature, a popular figure I picked up in a piazza in Naples. I myself was born in Rome and I am very Roman in this sense, very linked to what there already is around me. I have feelings and links to the working people of Rome, for example, for that group spirit which is so typical of the cinema among other things. Once the Romans used to go out and conquer the world, and today they are all working in the cinema. They are the real conquering workers, this caste of the earthy grips, like me. The Roman legionnaire must have been a film worker. Partisans, Romans, great workers. Like me.